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DEVELOPING COUNTY AND LOCAL PROGRAMS: PLAN USED IN OKLAHOMA.*

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Developing county and local programs is a subject as old as the county agent system itself, but even so it is comparatively new as compared with the other departments of our land-grant colleges. Since the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, May 8, 1914, making the extension service a permanent part of the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the land-grant colleges of the nation on conditions that were accepted by all States, the subject of developing county and local programs has been of much concern to all parties connected with the extension service and especially to those who are directly responsible for the programs that are to be carried out by the county agents in their respective counties.

Some of the most obvious difficulties in the way of developing a practical program for this line of educational work might be summed up as follows: First, the method of doing this kind of educational service was new to the colleges and the Department of Agriculture. Second, all positions had to be filled with men who had no previous training for this kind of service and many of whom had not even a clear vision of what might be accomplished. Third, these newly appointed representatives of the extension service had to deal with an unsympathetic public which had but little faith in the outcome of the great movement for the improvement of agriculture in the United States. Fourth, erroneous ideas had become prevalent among farm people concerning the real purposes of the extension service. But in spite of all these difficulties and others too numerous to mention, the problem of building a practical program has been tackled from many angles with more or less success.

When I was appointed assistant State agent in charge of county agent work in Oklahoma in July, 1920, I made a study of the methods that had been used in developing county and community programs up to that time. I found that in one stage of the development of this work the program was virtually a method of procedure developed by the county agent to suit his own notions. Many programs did not include within their scope a balanced system of agriculture, but permitted the agent, if he were the least bit inclined, to ride his particular hobby. I found that in one stage of development the supervisory force and the specialist at the college had worked out a kind of stereotyped hand-me-down form of program to send to the agent for him to fill in the number of demonstrations he would conduct, to sign, and to return to

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the office for the year's program. I found that at another time the district agents and the county agents were sitting down with this stereotyped form and filling in the number of demonstrations that would be conducted in the county for that year. The last-named method was in use at that time.

I found that in many States the extension workers had either directly or indirectly built an organization in order to enable them to do their work with groups instead of with individuals, and thereby reach more people and make the work more effective.

Upon close analysis, I was convinced that the first three methods should be classed as obsolete, for I fully realized that we had reached a stage in the development of the extension service when it was necessary to fully acquaint the people of the county with our program of work and our methods of conducting the work.

I also made a close analysis of the farm bureau plan which was used in neighboring States, and I am frank to confess that upon first analysis I was inclined to think that was the ideal plan. But, investigating further the difficulties encountered in other States and considering the opposition such a plan was sure to encounter in Oklahoma, I decided that it was impossible to use any one organization as a vehicle for carrying on extension work in Oklahoma.

With this information in hand and a full determination to work out some plan of developing county and community programs that would lessen some of the county agent's difficulties, I made a complete survey of one county in company with the district agent and county agent. We found that instead of one strong county farmers' organization through which we might conduct extension work, there were seven distinct organized groups that had for their aim the promotion of some line or lines of agriculture in that county. One part of the county had a few very active grange locals. Another had a few Farmers' Union locals. The poultry breeders had an active organization that was scattered well over the county. The Cotton Growers' Association had a strong membership well scattered over the county. Also the Pure Breeders' Association was quite a factor, and the county chamber of commerce had a strong agriculture committee that was active in all problems pertaining to agriculture and the Free Fair Board that represented all the people.

So, with this survey in hand, we decided to call our first program meeting for that county on the following basis. The county agent was to visit the head of each organization and explain to him the need of making a county program and the help that his organization could render by assisting in that work. When he fully understood the work to be done, he was asked to select at least three men from his organization to assist the extension forces in making a county program. When the men had been selected, the county agent visited each man and explained to him the work to be done and the part he was to take as a representative of his organization, and got a promise from him to meet in the county seat at the agent's call to work out the county program. After all the organizations' leaders had been visited and selection made and promise of attendance secured, the meeting was called for actually developing the county program.

After all the preliminary work had been done and a meeting had been called by the county agent to make a county program, the district agent and I went down to assist in developing the county program with the following aims in view:

First, To lay out a definite line of work so that an analysis could be made at the end of the year to see if any tangible results had been obtained; if not, why not.

Second, We expected to make the county agent's office the clearing house for agricultural information in the county by schooling a number of leaders of each organization on the possible service the office could render if properly supported by their respective organizations and by farmers in general.

Third, We expected to clear up some erroneous ideas about the purpose of extension work, especially the idea that the sole aim of the extension service is to increase production. In reality, it does not teach mere increased production but economic production.

Fourth, We expected to have this committee name the farm problems of the county. Then, we were to recommend demonstrations that have been proved by successful farm practice or experiment station data to be suitable for the existing conditions. Each time we were to determine the object of the demonstration, whether it was to demonstrate the value of good seed, the value of fertilizer, time of planting, method of culture, or whatever lesson was desirable to be taught in that particular neighborhood.

Fifth, We expected to bring before them the agricultural statistics for the county, let them see where their farm practices were out of balance, and have them adopt policies that would establish a balanced system of agriculture in the county.

Sixth, We expected to have a complete program worked out and signed by this committee, and copies furnished the press and all organizations in the county so that they would be able to inform any inquirer as to what kind of work the county agent was doing in the county.

Seventh, Last but not least, we expected to unify and systematize the county agent work so that it would be possible for the supervisory force to keep a proper check on work accomplished, and for the subject-matter specialists to properly correlate their program in order to make their services more effective over the entire State.

The committee met at 10 a.m. on the day set, and after a short explanation of what was to be done, each source of farm income was taken up, the difficulties named, remedies suggested, goals set, and policies agreed upon for guidance through the year's work. We adjourned at 4.30 p.m. feeling that we had made one step forward in program development in Oklahoma.

We actually had a county program that had been developed by a representative number of leading farmers in the county, who had named every difficulty, agreed upon remedies for improvement, set goals for demonstrating the remedies suggested, set up a number of policies that the extension service should advocate, and agreed to cooperate with the county agent in helping put them over. They agreed upon the amount of time to devote to each phase of the work and signed the program to be published in their county papers. This action publicly bound them to its support and added that committee to the number of those who had a true vision of county agent work.

During January and February, 1922, I personally supervised the developing of 15 county programs, taking care to do some work with each of the district agents so that we all should have the same plan in mind and be able to carry the same system to the entire State in 1923.

We followed this same method of developing programs as outlined above except that we called committees of both men and women if we had both agents in the county and worked out the programs together, but we did not follow the same method of selecting the committee. We found in some counties that there were not enough organized groups to furnish a representative committee. Then, it became necessary for the county agents, with such help as they might wish to solicit, to select a representative number of men and women to assist in the development of a county program. In order to save time, we found it better to have the whole committee together for consideration of the work that is common to both groups, than to have the men and women work separately till the closing hour and then come together and read the whole program and have it approved.

At the close of the crop year 1922, the results in these organized counties were sufficient to encourage us to extend the same system to the whole State as rapidly as possible. When the time for making programs closed in 1923, 52 counties had been organized under this plan with the remainder ready to take up the plan in 1924.

During the agents' meetings that were held in McAlester, Tulsa, Enid, and Chickasha in February, 1923, it became evident that there was a very weak connection between the programs presented to the agents by the subject-matter specialists showing the assistance they could render the county agents and the programs we were developing in the counties. This weakness was kept in mind throughout the year with a view to remedying that weakness for 1924. So, early in November a special conference of specialists was called by the director and the weakness of the past year's correlation of programs was discussed. After several hours of deliberation, the following plan was adopted. The week of November 19 was proclaimed by the director as annual report week for all county agents. No supervising agent or specialist was to make any dates in the field during that time, which meant that the entire field force would have a full week in the office. At this time, the subject-matter specialists were to have their 1924 programs worked out. A week's conference was to be held with the supervisory force and the specialists, and each specialist was to be given a chance to explain in detail his plan of work for 1924 and to suggest improvements that were needed in each county.

This plan was carried out by giving each specialist from one and one-half to two hours to explain fully the kind of work that should be undertaken in his particular subject the coming year. Each specialist also made a complete outline of his plan and supplied copies to all supervisors and county agents. So, all the supervisory force is in the field making programs at this time with a clear knowledge of what our subject-matter specialists are able to offer in the way of assistance to county agents. The county agents are thus enabled to develop a county program that is in perfect harmony with the ideas of the specialists, who are also required to work in harmony with the department heads at the college. For it must be remembered that though we expect the program committee to name all the problems, agree on the possible remedies, and set the goals, it will be necessary for the supervisor who directs the meeting to lead the committee in such a way that the program adopted will be in line with the policies and limitations of the extension service.

The community program.- How does it differ from the county program? The county is the unit of territory where the agent is serving. The community is only a fractional part. The county program is a full outline of all farm problems and agricultural policies that will come within the scope of the extension activities for one or more years.

The community program embraces only the specific part of the county program that is needed to be carried out in a given community, and the program may be either county-wide or local in its scope of importance. So, when the county program is built and the agents are able to comprehend the whole field they are expected to cover and the amount of time that can be allotted to each phase of the work, it is then up to the agent to proceed with the organization of his community programs in order to carry out the activities suggested by the county program. In our State, the method of carrying out the community program will vary with the county, and even in the county it will vary with different communities. Where the agents find local organizations of farm people, they organize community work through such locals. But, if no organization exists, it is necessary to form some kind of a community club where the farm folk can meet and discuss their farm problems and arrange to carry on the needed extension work for the community.

Time will not permit going into detail on methods of building community programs, so it will suffice to say that a good constructive county program can not be carried on without a large number of active communities cooperating with the county agent to make the extension work a success. We have had but one serious drawback in carrying out community programs. Some of our agents expected too much of local leaders or supervisors and were disappointed. Our experience in Oklahoma is that only the paid agencies can be expected to devote a specific amount of time to a particular project. The local leaders will assist and boost the work, but the county agents must so arrange their work that their success will not depend on the help from local leaders.

In conclusion, I wish to say that this plan of developing county programs is new to us. It has been in operation only two years and was tried

in 52 counties this year. But we believe that through this plan we shall be able to work out a well-balanced and unified program for both county and home demonstration agents, that will enable the supervisory force of the college to check the work properly each year and suggest timely changes for improvement. At the same time, we have a large group of men and women in the county who have assumed the responsibility of naming the things that should be done. Through this method of getting a group of people to assist us, we avoid the complications that are liable to rise if we ally the extension forces too closely with any one farm organization.

while doing. The richest field of all to enter is that of the 10,400,000 farm boys and girls who are strangers to any kind of club work. There must be many among them who would fit perfectly into a fruit club project. Closer cooperation with home demonstration agents and nutrition specialists in the making of better homes and better living is essential. Cooperation with business interests is necessary. The tackling of the vital problems in a big way is fundamental. We have the background of good work well done and the bright future of bigger things yet to be accomplished.

